Freda Smith Mudiman,
Lethbridge, Alberta.

OLD TIMERS' POW WOW

Pemmican Club's Annual New Year's Ball Will Be Happy Affair--Dates Back to 1885.

The Pemmican Club, official designation of the Old Timers' Association of Southern Alberta, again are sponsoring a dance in the Masonic hall on New Year's Eve. Invited guests are pioneers of the province, with their sons and daughters. An Old Timer is defined as, "Any person who has lived inthe North West Territories prior to December 31st, 1899."

Honorary presidents of the Pemmican club are F.W. Downer, Dr. A.M. Lafferty, W.D. L. Hardie, W.H. Morris and P. Egan. The president is L.F. Bonnell, first vice-president Jas. Perry, second vice-president, A.B. Pipes, and the secretary-treasurer Jas. S. Rose.

Members of the executive are the following: F. Whitney, P. Morris, J. Macdonald, F. Ewing, S. Russell, H. McKay, W.C. McKenzie, S. Niven and B. Niven. Assisting the former as a reception committee are Mrs. T. Niven, Mrs. A.B. Pipes, Mrs. Halliday, Mrs. G. Baldwin, Mrs. T. Nolan, Mrs. C. Lowther, Mrs. W. Lamb, Mrs. J. Gillespie, Mrs. W.O. Hutton, Mrs. W. McAdoo, and Mrs. E. Neidig.

HOW IT STARTED

Originated as a celebration for employees of the North West Coal and Navigation Company, and to officially open

their new boarding house in 1885, a New Year's dance is one of the oldest customs observed in Lethbridge. As in pioneer days, so also in times of stress, people turn to the simple pleasures. With war conditions there is a definite revival of the Old Time dances, so a large attendance is expected at this 55th anniversary of the Pemmican Club.

Dancing has always been a characteristic part of life on the prairies. When the ancestors of the Plains Indians came down from the North and spread fanwise over the land, they brought with them their tribal customs and ceremonial dances. Next to the High Plains came voyageurs, fur traders, and buffalo hunters who introduced the dances of Old and New France.

To the Red River came Lord Selkirk and his colonists, with them the songs of the Highlands, reels and strathspeys. Liveliest of all was the Red River Jig, which, strangely enough, would have passed into oblivion but for the timely action of the Old Timers' Association of Calgary. They searched till they found a family who remembered this dance. The music was taken down, as well as the dance, adapted to the piano, and in 1928, made permanent on a phonograph record.

Across the seas Robert Burns wrote:

"As he gazed amazed and curious
The mirth and fun grew fast and furious,
The piper loud and louder blew:
Nae cotillion brent frae France
But hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys, and reels,
Put life and mettle in their heels."

MOUNTED POLICE BALLS

After 1874 the North West Mounted Police balls were a highlight of the winter season in such centres as Macleod, Lethbridge, and Calgary. Like the ranchers who followed in close succession, they introduced the dances of upper and middle class England. The flood of settlers who followed the Canadian Pacific across the plains was a cosmopolitan influence, bringing the culture of many Old Lands to the New.

Around the turn of the century, in a homesteaders' shack on the "bald headed prairie" might be heard the scrape of a fiddle, the thud of a heavy boot, and a lusty voice raised in,

"Salute yer ladies! All together!
Ladies opposite the same.
Hit the lumber with your leather,
Balance all and swing your dame."

It is a far cry from the Sun Dance to Swing, but a happy medium is reached when pioneers from all over the South Country gather New Year's Eve to greet old friends, swap yarns, and welcome the dawn while keeping alive the old-time dances.